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NUMEN INEST: 'ANIMISM' IN GREEK AND ROMAN RELIGION

*Herbert Jennings Rose* 237

NOTES:

THE UNIVERSAL FAMINE UNDER CLAUDIUS

*Kenneth Sperber Gapp* 258



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# NUMEN INEST: 'ANIMISM' IN GREEK AND ROMAN RELIGION

HERBERT JENNINGS ROSE

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TO OVID, sophisticated as he was, ancient and simple piety made an appeal; not, as in the case of Vergil, because it accorded with deep-seated feelings of his own, but rather in the same way as plain fare will sometimes please an over-indulged palate, by a certain piquancy of contrast. It is therefore not so surprising that in him we find one of the most perfect expressions of the oldest recoverable stratum of Italian, or even ancient Mediterranean, religious sentiment. It occurs in the *Fasti*, iii, 296-7:

lucus Auentino suberat niger ilicis umbra,  
quo posses uiso dicere, Numen inest.

Frazer thus renders the couplet: 'Under the Aventine there lay a grove black with the shade of holm-oaks; at sight of it you could say, "There is a spirit here."' A Greek might have said *δαίμωνιος ὁ τόπος*, 'The place has a *daimon* in it.' What I propose to discuss is, not so much whether Frazer has translated this one passage adequately, but whether or not we are right in attributing to the earlier generations of classical worshippers a cult of any beings which may be correctly described as spirits at all.

If he wanted authority for his rendering, Frazer could find it abundantly in the works of the most approved writers. Warde Fowler, for instance, uses the word constantly in speaking of Roman *numina*. 'The domestic spirits do not figure largely in the private *ex-votos*'; <sup>1</sup> 'Vesta, the spirit of the fire'; <sup>2</sup> 'the spirits whom he (the old Latin settler) worships on his land.' <sup>3</sup> Bailey,

<sup>1</sup> W. Warde Fowler, *Roman Ideas of Deity*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Same, *Religious Experience of the Roman People*, 73.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.



in his charming work, *Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome*, has a whole chapter dealing with 'the spirits,' and in the first paragraph of that chapter he asserts that 'the kernel of the old Roman religion' was animism.<sup>4</sup> The Germans are less fond of the word, preferring to use *Gottheit* for *numen*; still, Preller says that nature, for the Romans, 'von Göttern und Geistern durchdrungen war';<sup>5</sup> A. von Domaszewski speaks of the *numina* as 'geistige Persönlichkeiten';<sup>6</sup> while if we turn to Greek religion, we shall find much the same phraseology. Farnell renders *δαίμων* by 'spirit';<sup>7</sup> Nilsson speaks of a rite of disguising as perhaps 'intended to mislead the spirits.'<sup>8</sup> But I need not multiply examples; with all the differences of opinion which beset these thorny subjects, most writers freely admit the existence of a stratum, or period, of belief in and worship of, not personal gods like those in Homer, but spirits of vaguer individuality and narrower functions, such as Lucina in Rome, Taraxippos or Eunos in Greece. The points at issue are regularly not whether any such worship existed, but how early it is, how widespread, how important, and so forth. With these questions we are not at present concerned. It is a tolerably safe assumption that the further back we go the more we find, or would find if our documentation were complete enough, of the vaguer kind of cult. It is certain that such vague pieties existed, in Greece, quite late, at all events among the less enlightened, and that in Italy it was not only the unenlightened who on occasion approached these indefinite beings with the traditional ritual, for their worship was commended by Vergil<sup>9</sup> and Tibullus<sup>10</sup> and half-seriously kept up by Horace.<sup>11</sup> What exactly were these persons worshipping? Or — for we may safely assume that to the poets

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., 34.

<sup>5</sup> Preller-Jordan, *Römische Mythologie*, Vol. i, 60.

<sup>6</sup> *Abhandlungen zur römischen Religion*, 161.

<sup>7</sup> L. R. Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> M. P. Nilsson, *History of Greek Religion*, 106.

<sup>9</sup> *Georg.*, ii, 493: *fortunatus et ille deos qui nouit agrestis*. The whole tone is Italian, though the examples he gives of such deities are mostly Greek.

<sup>10</sup> *Tib.*, i, 1, 19 ff.; *uos quoque . . . fertis munera uestra, Lares . . . agna cadet uobis, quam circum rustica pubes / clamet, Io, messes et bona uina date*.

<sup>11</sup> *As Carm.*, iii, 13.

I have named, probably also to less educated men among the later adorers of these beings, Lucina or Taraxippos was a spirit — what was the conception of them which we may suppose to have prevailed in the far-off days when such cults began to be instituted?

The term 'animism' is of course due to the late E. B. Tylor. Seeking an origin for religious practices, he found it in the conception of a soul, a something not exactly immaterial, — for he was far too good an anthropologist to credit the primitive mind with such advanced metaphysics, — but subtle, small, tenuous, or for one reason or another difficult if not impossible to perceive with our gross senses, whatever might be the case with the quickened perception of an expert medicine-man or even an ordinary man in a dream or trance; this something being supposed to inhabit the living body, to make it move, and on occasion to desert it temporarily (hence the phenomena of sleep and unconsciousness) or permanently, thus causing death. His theory had the advantage over some which have been put forward that it does appear to describe a really existent state of things; there are many human beings who still believe in these semi-immaterial essences, and therefore it is not absurd on the face of it that primitive man did so, or came to do so a comparatively short time after he began to be human.

Tylor went further and pointed to the numerous peoples who believe in the existence of beings like the supposed soul of man but not inhabiting human bodies. Besides ghosts, these comprise spirits of various sorts active in nature. There are, for example, spirits of disease, too vague to be called gods, but quasi-immaterial and capable of coming invisibly to a human being and possessing him, either to give him the disease which each of them has power to inflict or to make him the mouthpiece by which their will is known.<sup>12</sup> In South Canara, every village has its *bhūta sthānam* or demon-shrine,<sup>13</sup> and the inhabitants of these modest temples are appealed to for all manner of help, such as protecting the crops and cattle from tigers, wild boars,

<sup>12</sup> Abundant examples in A. J. N. Tremearne, *The Ban of the Bori*, especially chaps. xviii–xxviii.

<sup>13</sup> E. Thurston, *Omens and Superstitions of Southern India*, 162.



and other dangerous beasts, in return for votive offerings representing these animals. The spirits of rivers are well known enough; it was probably with such a one that Jacob wrestled.<sup>14</sup> And the list might be lengthened indefinitely by examples from all parts of the world of spirits of mountains, trees, storms, the sea, personal guardians of individual men and women, and so on. No one doubts the class of facts appealed to by Tylor, for they are abundantly attested and fresh researches bring to light more of them. The only question is whether this widespread belief is so universal and so primitive as he suggested; and our present purpose is to enquire whether it was found in the earlier or more backward strata of classical worship. That people like the earliest Greeks and Italians of whom we have any knowledge might have believed in such beings there is no need to doubt; the point to be determined is whether or not they did.

In discussing this question, it is well to begin by ridding ourselves of certain irrelevancies. It is not to the point to insist that, so far as our material goes, the earlier generations of Greeks, at all events, and presumably the earlier Italians likewise, were incapable of conceiving bodiless existence. The Homeric ghosts, for example, lack solidity (*φρένες οὐκ ἐνι πάμπαν*, they have no 'insides');<sup>15</sup> but they are not altogether without body, having apparently a sort of misty structure and being capable of absorbing literal and material blood, which a wholly spiritual creature could not do.<sup>16</sup> Ghosts which are animated corpses appear now and then in Greek tradition,<sup>17</sup> and even such an apparent abstraction as Death is so solid that, in the legend of Alkestis, Herakles overcomes him in a literal wrestling-match. The Homeric gods are so far from being disembodied that they are not really invisible; only there is a mist over men's eyes which prevents the divine figures being seen and known unless they choose to reveal themselves,<sup>18</sup> and the most mysterious of them, the Erinyes, walks in thick cloud<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Genesis, 32, 24 ff.; cf. Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*, ii, p. 410 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Ψ 104.

<sup>16</sup> λ 95 ff., 153, etc.

<sup>17</sup> Notably the 'hero' of Temesa, Pausanias, vi, 6, 7-11; cf. Rose, *Primitive Culture in Greece*, 104 f.

<sup>18</sup> E 127-8.

<sup>19</sup> *ἡεροφοῖτις* 'Ερινύς, I 571, T 87.

and so is apparently never seen. Coming to a more reflective age, we find so eminent a philosopher as Empedokles identifying thought with the pericardial blood; <sup>20</sup> I pass over the various post-Sokratic theories of a material soul, Epicurean, Stoic, and so forth, because these are not due to inability to conceive it as immaterial, but to a conviction that if it were immaterial it could not move the body, for the immaterial can touch nothing; *tangere enim et tangi, nisi corpus, nulla potest res*, to cite Tertulian's favourite Lucretian tag.<sup>21</sup> All these facts are correct enough, but not in point now. We do not postulate immateriality as an attribute of the kind of spirit in which the earlier ages of mankind believed and the more undeveloped races, and members of the more developed ones, still believe. It is enough if the spirits are less material than ordinary gross bodies; only a strong effort of abstraction enables a savage to say that his god is 'like fire' or 'like air'; <sup>22</sup> and to take the further step of saying that a supernatural being is not even so dense as these elements is a long process, not to be expected of those for whom Homer's ancestors sang or who instituted the cult of the *indigetes*.

But there is, I think, one attribute which we must claim before we can admit that the object of a cult is to be called a spirit, and that is activity and at least the rudimentary personality which goes with the assertion that someone or something acts. Jacob's river-spirit was a vague creature enough, which vanished with the dawn and would not tell its name; but it was active, since it sprained Jacob's thigh and afterwards gave him a formal blessing before departing, and he came to the very reasonable conclusion that it was an El, a god of some kind, and named the place accordingly. The Hausa Bori can be represented by pictures or puppets, and something is known of their habits and those of their singularly ill-behaved and undisciplined children. Of the Indian demons, some at least have personal names. With this modicum of personality goes also some-

<sup>20</sup> αἷμα γὰρ ἀνθρώποις περικάρδιόν ἐστι νόημα, Empedokles in Porphyry ap. Stob., i, 424, 19, Wachsmuth; it is interesting that the Neoplatonist cannot understand Empedokles' materialism and supposes that he thought the blood was *δργανον πρὸς σίνεσιν*, *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Lucretius, i, 304; Tert., de anima, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Father W. Schmidt, Origin and Growth of Religion, 266.



thing like a locally defined sphere of activity, at least as a rule; a spirit is of this river, of this grove, of the sky, and so forth. This, however, is not a point on which I should lay much stress, for a manifestation of power, be it spiritual or not, must show itself somewhere, and any notable manifestation would tend to be localized. An Australian *churinga* is certainly not a spirit, but being a material object it has a place; the same applies to the talismans of more advanced peoples. On the other hand, such a formidable bogey as the spirit of smallpox is to be defined by what it does rather than by where it is. But on this I would insist: that when we hear of belief in a spirit, we are to understand that, according to the believers' account, there is a power, however vaguely conceived, which is thought of as doing something, and regularly also as having at least some other characteristics, some known likes and dislikes, for example. Thus the Hausa Bori, already mentioned, are not very clearly defined figures, and indeed all possibility of their growth into anything comparable to the Olympian gods is removed by the vigorous personality of Allah, for the Hausa are nominal Muslims and these spirits are merely courtiers of the supreme Deity. But it is known, for instance, that Alkali, the Bori who is the patron of dyers, prefers as his sacrifice a ram with black rings around its eyes; that Musai, or Buzu, is a slave of Ba-Absini, and that he therefore is very humble, even when possessing a votary, asks leave to dance, and is interrupted in his song by his more enterprising master, who says 'Buzu, give me your mount' (i.e., pass from the medium and let me possess him); concerning Ba-Absini himself there is some doubt whether a pair of black fowls or a red cock and a white hen should be sacrificed to him, although all theologians are agreed that he is a thief. It is likewise known that Bebe, besides his power of making people deaf and dumb (as his name, 'deaf-mute,' implies), is unpopular with the other Bori, for he always causes his medium to make signs that they are lying, and they dislike this and go away.<sup>23</sup> I need not insist here how great is the wealth of information concerning the personal habits and feelings of the Greek gods, who, material though they may seem to us after many centuries of

<sup>23</sup> Tremearne, *op. cit.*, 300, 364, 361, 365.



metaphysics, are undoubted denizens of the spirit-world, if only by virtue of their power to deal, when occasion arises, with such ethereal creatures as dreams and ghosts.<sup>24</sup> We shall return presently to this celestial gossip which bulks so large in our handbooks of mythology, and whose absence from Italy the Greeks themselves noticed.<sup>25</sup>

Having laid down these preliminary axioms, let us see whether or not the vaguer figures of ancient cult correspond to the properties of spirits as I have outlined them. Beginning with Greece, let us consider the word *δαίμων*. I take it that we need not discuss *θεός* at any great length, for it is so continually applied to the vigorous Olympians that its connotation of full personality needs no proof; I shall have occasion presently to treat of an apparent exception to this statement. But *δαίμων* is notoriously a vaguer word, which, while it can be applied to a god, takes on, at least after Homer, a wider meaning, signifying not only a god but any being in any way superhuman. With its later philosophical development, by virtue of which it comes to mean an intermediate, semi-divine person, we are not now dealing, for our subject confines us to much earlier stages of religious history than that. The word, then, clearly signifies an agent of some sort. Formally, it is exactly like *ἐπιστήμων*, a knower, *μνήμων*, a rememberer, *δαήμων*, a perceiver, — with which indeed it has been connected by etymological speculation in the past,<sup>26</sup> — *τλήμων*, an endurer, and so forth. It must signify 'one who does' something, though exactly what, is not certain; perhaps 'an assigner,' connecting it with the root of the verb *δαίω*. This would make good enough sense, for certainly one activity with which a *daimon* is credited on occasion is that of assigning their destiny to mortals. By analogy with the other words of like termination, it should be rather adjectival than substantival; so *τλήμων*, for instance, is rather 'sorely tried,' 'unfortunate,' than

<sup>24</sup> As B 6 ff.; ω 1 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *ant. Rom.*, ii, 18, 3, Romulus instituted very fitting rites in honour of the gods, τοὺς δὲ παραδεδομένους περὶ αὐτῶν μύθους, ἐν οἷς βλασφημίαι τινὲς ἔνεισι κατ' αὐτῶν ἢ κακηγορίαι, πονηροὺς καὶ ἀνοφελεῖς καὶ ἀσχήμονας ὑπολαβὼν εἶναι καὶ οὐχ ὅτι θεῶν ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἀνθρώπων ἀγαθῶν ἀξίους, ἅπαντας ἐξέβαλε.

<sup>26</sup> So Plato, *Crat.*, 398 b, followed by some moderns; the revised Liddell and Scott prefers the suggested connection with *δαίω*.

'one who can endure.' This again suits its vagueness, for it is rather a description of a certain kind of being than his name; the gods are *δαίμονες*, 'fate-assigning,' if that is what the word means, just as they are *μακάρες*, 'blessed,' *ἀθάνατοι*, 'undying,' and so forth. Thus it signifies a certain quality, a *proprium*, of such beings. But it is an active property, one attaching itself to a personality of some kind, however little the person may be known or however vaguely conceived. With all our training in abstraction it would not be easy to conceive of assignments without an assigner, or (if we prefer the old etymology) of perception coming out of a void which contained no percipient. So far, then, we are justified in taking the *daimon* as a person of some sort.

But of course it does not follow that, because the idea of personality is to be found in connection with certain views of the supernatural held by a particular people at a particular time, people always held those views and did not develop them out of something else. It is perfectly arguable that believers in a personal being, or beings, who exercise power of some kind, once had a vaguer notion, namely that there was power somewhere. A child may know dimly from hearsay that certain things, such as cooking, lighting, transport, are done by electricity, without as yet having the faintest idea what an electrical appliance is like, or even that there is such a thing. Perhaps he lives in a backward district, where cooking is done over a wood fire, candles or oil lamps give the only artificial light, and people get about on foot, or at best with the aid of a horse or a venerable and very second-hand product of the activities of Mr. Ford; but he may have heard, half incredulously, of a wonderland called a city where fires light themselves, illumination comes without scraping of matches, and things on wheels which need no cranking up and no harnessing of horses convey the Blessed immense distances; and his information may include the fact that a something called electricity is somehow responsible for all this. The more sophisticated city child early hears of batteries, switches, dynamos, and their kind, and probably, even if he knows no more, has learned how to replace the wire in a fuse. Deprive the country child of his civilized vocabulary and he would probably



use, to describe the force of which he had imperfectly heard, some word meaning 'power,' perhaps implying also that the power was more than mortal, or at least than ordinary everyday powers, like the muscular strength which serves to chop wood or haul in a big fish.

Now 'power,' or, for the word is adjectival as well, 'powerful,' seems to be the root meaning of that famous Melanesian and Polynesian term *mana*, as likewise of its equivalents on this continent, *orenda* and *wakanda*. Some things are, or contain, 'heap big medicine,' and not only some things but some persons and some actions.<sup>27</sup> A chief, for example, owes his rank to the possession of *mana*, whereby he can enlist in the service of his own designs the power of *tindalo*, worshipful and mighty ghosts. The ritual which he practices is likewise *mana*, and to inherit such ritual is to inherit *mana*, and, it may be, chieftainship with it. After initiation into one of the *qatu* or secret societies on Aurora Island, the neophyte performs certain mysteries with a piece of hibiscus-bark and so gets *mana* for catching fish. To gain high rank in similar societies is a very expensive business; only those possessed of much *mana* can get the where-withal to pay the fees. Not only men have *mana*, but also spirits, and ghosts generally; such various things as weather-charms and arrow-poison are again *mana*. These Melanesians are a very long way from being primitive; but the theory has gained ground, and I think deservedly, since its first suggestion by J. H. King in 1892 and its better-known re-suggestion by R. R. Marett in 1899,<sup>28</sup> that their ideas, in some inchoate and ill-defined form, existed among mankind before any idea so relatively advanced and philosophical as that of ghosts or spirits was thought of. In other words, it is quite commonly held that there was a pre-animistic stage of religion, in which there was as yet no class of beings who were powerful *ex officio*, so to speak, but merely power, which might manifest itself in all kinds of

<sup>27</sup> The following examples are taken from Bp. Codrington's classical work, *The Melanesians, their Anthropology and Folklore*, 52, 57, 90, 115, 119, 200, 307.

<sup>28</sup> J. H. King, *The Supernatural, its Origin, Nature and Evolution*, a book neglected in its own day and now so rare that I have only once seen a copy; R. R. Marett, *Pre-animistic Religion*, in *Folk-Lore*, xi, 1900, 162-82 = *The Threshold of Religion* (London, Methuen, 1909), 1-32.

ways. It is no fatal objection to point out, as has repeatedly been done, that no such stage now exists anywhere <sup>29</sup> in its purity; by parity of reasoning it could be made out that man never used either unwrought stones or eoliths as his tools, because every existing people has at least got to the stage of making implements comparable to palaeoliths, and most of them are much further on in their material culture than that. We may fairly postulate that belief in something like *mana* is to be found, and in fields nearer home than Melanesia. Grønbech <sup>30</sup> declares that in the Teutonic field the antithesis 'soul or *mana*' is meaningless, for the Teutons believed simultaneously in both; still more to the point, a recent and very thoughtful expositor of Homeric theology <sup>31</sup> is of the opinion that the really important differentia of Homeric gods is not their immortality nor their blessedness, but their power, *δύναμις*, the very word in all Greek which, if we include its later uses, is least unlike *mana* in meaning. Whether such an idea as *mana* be pre-animistic or not, certain it is that non-animistic beliefs can be found, for they appear wherever magic is practiced, from the *arungquilttha* of the Australians to the highest flights of Graeco-Roman or mediaeval sorcery; even when spirits are invoked, as they very commonly are, the process regularly begins with a *mana*-ful operation which compels the spirit, or god, to answer and obey. So, then, while recognizing in the gods whom we find the Greeks worshipping as far back as any records go personal beings, it is open to us to suppose that Hellenic belief extended also to impersonal manifestations of power, *δύναμις*, and to ask whether the daimones may not be such, at least originally.

Professor M. P. Nilsson is rather inclined to answer affirmatively. In his admirable study, *Götter und Psychologie bei Homer*,<sup>32</sup> he says, 'Where the gods cannot manifest activity, there remains the general background, the hidden power; all that comes to light is the manifestations of the power, and these

<sup>29</sup> As by R. Karsten, *Origins of Religion*, London, Kegan Paul, 1935, 33.

<sup>30</sup> Vilhelm Grønbech, *Soul or Mana?* (Copenhagen, 1913).

<sup>31</sup> Erland Ehnmark, *The Idea of God in Homer* (Uppsala, 1935), 10, 'Divine nature is power and power is the essential attribute of the gods.'

<sup>32</sup> See *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, xxii (1924), 363 ff.; the above is translated from p. 384. The whole passage is well worth study.



are called *daimones*. The *daimones* are remodelled on the pattern of gods and spirits, till in later times they are individual spirits, demons in our sense of the word, and are appointed to a place in the divine hierarchy as its lowest rank.' This, he goes on, explains why, when something happens which cannot be referred to an individual god, Homer's people attribute it to a *daimon*, or use some similarly vague expression for a manifestation of power, such as *μοῖρα*, *αἶσα* or the like, words which there is no ground whatsoever for spelling with capital letters or supposing to have meant originally individual deities. If we accept this, then we are by no means obliged to suppose that daimonism, so to call it, implied animism; if ever there was such a stage as pre-animism in Greek religious history, the Homeric and later *δαίμονες* may be a survival of it.

I do not, however, think his case made out satisfactorily. It is quite true that *δαίμων* is a vague word. The ghost of Amphimedon, for example, having no such exclusive information as Homer enjoys concerning the divine agents in the return of Odysseus, says merely 'an evil *daimon* brought him.'<sup>33</sup> It is even the case that *σὺν δαίμονι*, *κατὰ δαίμονα* and so forth, in and out of Homer, mean 'with, in accordance with, destiny' or 'luck' or 'chance,' or 'divine grace,' or the like; Hektor, threatening Diomedes, even says *πάρος τοι δαίμονα δώσω*,<sup>34</sup> 'ere that I will deal thee bane,' while *δαίμων* is a common tragic equivalent of 'lot' or 'fate'; and the tragedians did not originate such a usage, for Hesiod says *δαίμονι δ' οἶος ἔησθα, τὸ ἐργάζεσθαι ἄμεινον*, 'for a man such as fortune had made thee, work were better.'<sup>35</sup> But on the other hand we must remember two things. One is that a god, who is certainly a personal being, is often called a *δαίμων*,<sup>36</sup> and the gods in general *δαίμονες*, suggesting that to Homer the word did not mean an impersonal power but rather one either undefined by him or impossible to be defined by anyone; which is very different from saying that it is by nature indefinite. Again to take the instance of the child's knowledge of

<sup>33</sup> ω 149, *καὶ τότε δὴ δ' Ὀδυσῆα κακὸς ποθεν ἤγαγε δαίμων*.

<sup>34</sup> Θ 166.

<sup>35</sup> Hesiod, *op. et di.*, 314.

<sup>36</sup> As Γ 420.

electricity, it might well be that he knew of the existence, for example, of dynamos, but could not say how they were made or used; such things would be simply electrical machines to him, with no particulars available or given. So with many of the vaguer uses of *δαίμων*. Hesiod will not attempt to say to what god his brother's character is due, but doubtless some superhuman being is responsible; that which befalls a man is due to the activities of a deity of some kind, be it good or evil, *ἐξ ἡμέων γάρ φασι κακ' ἔμμεναι*, as Zeus complains,<sup>37</sup> and the gods are notoriously *δωτηῆρες ἐάων* likewise.<sup>38</sup> In these cases, then, the supernatural electricity comes from an active source, a spirit of some kind, but such particulars as the name and other functions, if any, of the being who is thus active are not forthcoming. The other point is that the word *θεός* itself is on occasion used in an impersonal way. A rumour, says Hesiod,<sup>39</sup> is not wholly in vain that many people repeat: *θεός νύ τίς ἐστι καὶ αὐτή*; it too is a sort of god. The later readers of his poem seem to have found the phrase puzzling, to judge by Tzetzes' worried attempt to gloss it, *θεοῦται καὶ παράμονος μένει*.<sup>40</sup> Now, if *θεός* can be so depersonalized, being the name for a clear-cut, anthropomorphic being, much more can the vaguer *δαίμων*; we have in such phrases as *δαίμονα δώσω* for *μόρον*, *θάνατον δώσω* no sufficient proof that the original sense was impersonal, but only that, in a language still comparatively poor in abstract nouns and not much used to forming them, it could be used impersonally. Ages later, again in a language not abounding in abstract terms, theologians felt the need of a technical term to denote the human, as opposed to the divine, nature of Christ. They could hardly employ *humanitas*, for that had totally different connotations; therefore they fell back, not seldom, on *homo*, by much the same kind of metonymy as that by which Cicero uses *orator* to mean oratory, or oratorical studies.<sup>41</sup> Certainly *homo* is a word which,

<sup>37</sup> α 33.

<sup>38</sup> θ 325; also Hesiodic.

<sup>39</sup> Hesiod, *op. et di.*, 763-4.

<sup>40</sup> Scholia ad Hesiodum, 841 (in Vol. III of Gaisford, *Poetae minores Graeci*, Oxford, 1820).

<sup>41</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.*, i, 5. Characteristic passages in the Fathers are Augustine, *epp.*, 137, 9, *hominem . . . quem non consumpsit utique (Christus) sed assumpsit*; *ibid.*, 12,



properly used, uncompromisingly signifies an individual, concrete person, and not anything so abstract as 'humanity.' In like manner, I think, when we find *δαίμων* employed so vaguely that it no longer implies an individual, personal even though not identified or described, we may pretty safely assume that it has undergone a metonymy, and is being used, much like its own later derivative *τὸ δαιμόνιον*, to mean an example or expression of divine power, whether coming from a personal agent or not. It is significant that when Roman writers wish to translate the word, their usual equivalent is *genius*, not *numen*.

If now we pass from Greece to Italy, and look once more at Ovid's couplet, we are in a different atmosphere altogether. Starting again from the etymology, we have an easier task than in the Greek field, for the word is perfectly plain in both root and suffix. It is a passive formation from the root of *nuo*, exactly like *flumen* from that of *fluo*. Also, it is of course neuter, like all of its class, save the mysterious and obscure *flamen*, a priest (*flamen*, a blast of wind, is easy enough). Therefore it had originally no nominative case and could not be spoken of as doing anything. And this restriction is pretty well observed in classical Latin. A *numen* is to be found in the grove, in Ovid; because her *numen* was somehow insulted, Iuno in Vergil <sup>42</sup> was hostile to the Trojans; Iuppiter in Horace <sup>43</sup> freezes the fallen snow *puro numine*, by using his unclouded power. It is not restricted to gods; noteworthy men or bodies of men possess it on occasion. For instance, — I leave on one side the many examples of someone, in a loyal inscription, being *deuotus numini* of a half-deified or wholly deified emperor, — the Senate has it in Livy.<sup>44</sup> Most interesting perhaps of all, and a passage of which

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Verbum igitur Dei . . . suscepit hominem seque et illo fecit unum Iesum Christum . . . minorem. . . . Patre secundum carnem, hoc est secundum hominem; 14, 3, ille homo quem Deus suscepit. Jerome, *epp.*, 98, 4, assumpsit hominem, dumtaxat sine peccato.

<sup>42</sup> Ver., Aen., i, 8, *quo numine laeso*; to which may be added scores of passages where *numen* is coupled with the name of a god in the gen.

<sup>43</sup> Horace, Carm., iii, 10, 7, *positas ut glaciet niues puro numine Iuppiter*.

<sup>44</sup> Livy, vii, 30, 20, *adnuite, patres conscripti, nutum numenque uestrum inuietum Campanis*. It is true that the Senate are here being invited to behave very like the Homeric Zeus (A 528), but no one suggests that they are actually divine. Cicero, Phil., iii, 32, ascribes *numen* to the Senate; Post reditum ad Quirites, 13, to the people of Rome. Cf. Ovid, *Ars amatoria*, i, 203, *date numen eunti*.

less has been made than is fitting, is a line of Manilius' strange mixture of shaky astrology, third-rate rhetoric, and first-rate ingenuity in getting arithmetical calculations into smooth hexameters. It is in one of his most readable passages, that wherein, echoing Choirilos of Samos, he complains that all the great themes have already been handled, and then comforts himself with the thought that divine astrology has yet to be adequately dealt with in a poem. Among those who have preempted most matters is Hesiod, and one of his subjects was

siluarumque deos sacrataque numina Nymphis.<sup>45</sup>

The line is the more remarkable because it is inadequately dealt with by Housman, who is inclined to think it corrupt; I therefore dwell on it for a moment, as it is very relevant to the proper understanding of *numen*. Manilius, though far from the best of Latin poets, had a good understanding of his native language, and so has greatly perplexed certain editors (though as a rule not the latest one), who were less well seen in that difficult tongue. Here, then, we may note attentively that he actually distinguishes between *numina* and even minor deities. The former are not identical with, but actually sacred to, the latter. What, then, are *numina* to the poet? We may understand him if we remember what sort of places were sacred to Nymphs. Examples are not lacking. There is the cave at Ithake, in the Odyssey,<sup>46</sup> with its stalactites and stalagmites and its inaccessible entrance through which the gods alone could pass. There is the romantic rock-girt harbour in Vergil,<sup>47</sup> shadowed with trees on the cliffs above it and leading to a cave with natural seats in the native stone and fresh water trickling to the sea; here the tired bark needed no anchor nor mooring-rope, and Aeneas' men found welcome repose after their toils in the storm. There is the ancient grove of Demeter in Kallimachos,<sup>48</sup> where the nymphs were wont to sport at noontide. There is the cave in Longus,<sup>49</sup> where Chloe was found, with the stray ewe suckling her like a

<sup>45</sup> Manilius, ii, 23; with the tone of the whole passage cf. Choirilos, frag. 1, Naekius.

<sup>46</sup> *v*, 96-112.

<sup>47</sup> Verg., Aen., i, 159-169, partly imitated from Homer, 136-141.

<sup>48</sup> Kall., hymn. in Cer., 26 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Longus, Pastoralia, i, 4-5.



human mother. Of all these places ancient piety might well say *numen inest*, as Ovid does of the grove on the Aventine. Manilius, in a way which the South Pacific would easily understand, goes a little further and says that they are *numina*, — he might also have said, had he wished, that they are *loca sancta* or *religiosa*, — and to make it quite plain what sort of *numen* he means, he adds that they were sacred to the Nymphs.

We see, therefore, that *numen*, so far from being always or regularly attached to a person, — to say nothing of being identical with one, — is not always attributed to or identified with animate things. That the stars have it in Vergil <sup>50</sup> is a matter of less importance, for they are often thought of as alive and divine in their own right; when Sinon cries

uos, aeterni ignes, et non uiolabile uestrum  
testor numen,

he is calling upon the visible heavenly bodies, including the sun — for it is broad daylight as yet — to bear witness to his oath, cunningly framed so as not to contain a formal falsehood,<sup>51</sup> yet full of deceit for that very reason, an oath of the sort in which Autolykos excelled all men.<sup>52</sup> Rather less animate are the boundary-marks on which the *fetiales* used to call; <sup>53</sup> *tu quoque numen habes*, says Ovid to the boundary-stone,<sup>54</sup> and we may be sure that the *fines* of a country would be no less regarded and no less full of *mana* than the 'stone or stump buried in the field' which marked off Gaius' farm from that of Seius. To say that there was a spirit in the stone is begging the question; it would be more correct to say that it was a fetish, an object into which

<sup>50</sup> Verg., Aen., ii, 154.

<sup>51</sup> He says (*ibid.*, 157 ff.) that it is *fas* for him to hate the Greeks and reveal all their secrets, and that he is not bound by any laws of his native country. This is true; he is a prisoner in the hands of the Trojans, and therefore, by Roman ideas, has suffered *capitis deminutio* and is not a Greek citizen until and unless restored by *postliminium*; it is perfectly open to him to make the best bargain he can with his captors and induce them by his services to their cause to admit him into their community. If they assume from his ambiguous language that he is really going to do so, that is their affair; he has sworn merely that he may if he likes, and is therefore not liable to any supernatural punishment for perjury. See Horace, Carm., iii, 5, 42, and the parallels collected by commentators there; Callistratus and Ulpian in Dig., iv, 6, 14-15.

<sup>52</sup> τ 396.

<sup>53</sup> Livy, i, 32, 6, audi Iuppiter, inquit, audite fines (cuiuscunque gentis sunt, nominat), audiat fas.

<sup>54</sup> Ovid, Fast., ii, 642.

'medicine' had been put; for the stone or stake was not yet a *terminus*, however accurately it had been placed, until the proper ritual had been gone through. 'When (the ancients) were setting out their boundary marks,' says Siculus Flaccus,<sup>55</sup> 'they would put the stones themselves upright on the unbroken earth near the spots in which they were going to dig pits and fix them. They then decorated them with ointment, coverings, and garlands. In the holes in which they were to fix them they made sacrifice and slaughtered a victim, which they burned with lighted torches. With covered heads they let the blood drip into the hole, and also cast therein incense, corn, likewise honeycombs and wine; and other things with which it is customary to make sacrifice to Terminus they put into the holes also. When all the sacrificial foods were burned with fire they set the stones on top of the hot ashes, and so proceeded to fix them with care and attention, even adding some broken pieces of stone stamped down all around them, to make them stand firmer.' When all these pains had been taken, the stone could not fail *numen habere*, to be full of *mana*; but nothing in all the ritual suggests conjuring the littlest godling or ghost into it.

When, in these crucial instances, we find that to have *numen* in no way implies having any kind of life or spirit, we may reasonably begin to doubt whether 'spirit' is the proper word, not only to translate *numen*, but to describe the many minor godlings of Rome. Vesta, for example, may claim life, because fire has movement and sound; but Ianus' case is weaker, for a street door or a gate is not a very animated object, and Venus has the weakest claim of the three, for she has a name feminine only, as it were, by courtesy, every other noun of that formation being as uncompromisingly neuter as *numen* itself. There is not much doubt, to my mind at least, that she was originally nothing more than a manifestation of power, a *numen* in short, taking the form of the pleasing appearance (*uenus*) of a garden well stocked with potherbs.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Siculus Flaccus in *Gromatici ueteres*, p. 141 Lachmann. See the excellent commentary of Frazer on the passage of Ovid cited in n. 54 and on the whole matter of the cult of Terminus, *Fasti of Ovid*, Vol. ii, p. 481 ff.

<sup>56</sup> For Venus' connection with gardens, see Wissowa, *Rel. u. Kult.*,<sup>2</sup> 289.



We therefore conclude that there is a decidedly non-animistic strain in Roman cult, revealing itself by the gender and uses of the word *numen*. We may now ask whether it is also pre-animistic, in other words whether such a conception is historically earlier on Italian soil than the notion, which did undoubtedly exist in classical times, that the gods are some sort of persons and have a nature more or less spiritual. I think here the answer is in the affirmative. We have seen that in the case of a goddess, and that not the least important in those periods of which we know the most, there is good reason to hold that she has sex-gender superimposed upon her original grammatical gender and arising from the circumstance that she came to be conceived of as female. We have in addition good grounds for saying that under the Republic, at a period probably much later than its inception, the official opinion at least was that a *numen* was an agent, and therefore a living being; we must add, a spiritual being, however crudely conceived. The proof is the famous list, derived from Fabius Pictor and preserved to us by Servius,<sup>57</sup> of the minor deities to be invoked along with Tellus and Ceres. They are twelve in number; their names are all alike, all masculine, and all end in *-tor*; in fact they are *nomina agentis*. This list is certainly artificial, the result of pontifical regularizing of the cult; it is not very late, for Fabius Pictor took part in the second Punic War, and also not very early, for its author introduces a deity called Conditor, proving that he no longer knew what the name of Consus meant. It would therefore seem as if the Roman mind, slow-working but logical, had come to the conclusion that if there is an activity there must be an agent behind it, and was expressing that conviction in the terminology of its religion. We may compare the process by which, feeling that if something is done it must be done to someone or someone, an earlier generation of Italians turned the impersonal voice of the Italo-Keltic verb into a patchwork but intelligible passive.

We therefore seem justified in supposing that there really was a period in the religious history of Italy which may fairly be called pre-animistic. In this, we may guess, there may indeed

<sup>57</sup> Servius auctus on Verg., Georg., i, 21; cf. Wissowa, *Gesammelte Abhand.*, 309 ff.

have been gods of some importance; Iuppiter, to judge by his name, came with the first speakers of a Wiro language into the peninsula; Mars shows every sign of being old, and besides is called by a name which is a pure substantive. But, since the idea of personality was but feebly conceived, we may suppose that even these great ones were not much more than focal points of *numen*, great assemblages of *mana*. Moreover, the fact that they were not conceived of as spirits, even of the most material sort, explains why both of them were, and did not merely live in or govern, material objects, stone axes in one case, spears in the other.<sup>58</sup> *Mana*, so far as our knowledge goes, is not conceived of as a sort of boundless reservoir of power, located nowhere in particular and to be drawn on at need; it is a phenomenon which appears here and there, and, with proper handling and observance of the distinction between *tapu* and *noa*, *sanctum* and *profanum*, may be diverted to such uses as the officiants think good, or at least prevented from doing harm. Another instance of such *mana* was Vesta, another again Volkanus; given that neither was more than a *numen*, or instance of *numen*, there is nothing to puzzle anyone in the fact that Vesta was there whenever a hearth-fire was alight, and Volkanus wherever there was a conflagration or a volcano. *Mana*, *numen*, not being a person, is not hampered by the restrictions of personality.

While on the subject of these material epiphanies of *mana*, I would point out that among the few material objects in Greece which may be reasonably explained as *being* (not representing or inhabited by) gods are three connected with Zeus, namely Zeus Kataibates, Zeus Keraunos, and Zeus Kappotas; we perhaps might add the stone at Delphoi which was shown as the one swallowed by Kronos in mistake for his son.<sup>59</sup> If, as I am in-

<sup>58</sup> See, besides the innumerable longer and fuller discussions of these aniconic deities, Rose, *Primitive Culture in Italy*, 45-47. But I would abandon the statement I there made that 'the stone is older than Iuppiter' (p. 46), at least in so far as the veneration of the stone, or stones, is concerned. It was, I take it, a supposed thunderbolt, therefore a 'numinous' thing from the sky. Now Iuppiter and all his etymological peers have in common celestial activity; therefore, if Iuppiter was essentially sky-*numen*, then storm, thunder, thunderbolt, frost, and so forth might all alike be Iuppiter. So, therefore, might the stone be, and consequently it is Iuppiter Lapis, not *lapis Iovius*.

<sup>59</sup> For the three titles of Zeus, see Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, i, 149. For the



clined to think, these are among the very earliest monuments of Zeus' worship (the Delphic stone was already old and mythologized in the days of Hesiod),<sup>60</sup> then we may perhaps see in them a very ancient pre-animistic stage peeping through the animism which, as we saw, was prominent in early Greece. It is very interesting that it should be the old Wiro sky-god, or weather-god, who is thus associated; for it constitutes a further indication that he was an extremely vague and impersonal deity, far different from the beneficent celestial king of von Schroeder's and Father Schmidt's imagination.<sup>61</sup> Like the generality of early sky-gods, he was nothing but sky-*mana*, and all his greater qualities are secondary.

One question at least receives a welcome accession of intelligibility once we have grasped this distinction between the Greek and the Roman ways of looking at the universe, as originally tending in the one case to be animistic, in the other orondist, to borrow a technicality from Pfister. That is the problem why the former have a rich mythology, the latter none. Given that both peoples were capable of enjoying and inventing stories, a capacity which is denied to but few races of mankind, it is evident that they could let their imagination work on two principal subjects, men and the non-human powers of the universe. Of the former, both peoples seem to have told stories, the Greeks more and better ones, for their wits were decidedly the sharper, but the Romans some few at all events,<sup>62</sup> though of those which we now have, many are patently late and hellenizing. Here, then, the difference is merely between more and less, richer and poorer. But when we come to the gods, scarcely a single Greek deity, however minor and obscure, is without his myth, even in our sorely damaged tradition; while for Italy, we cannot point with certainty to so much as one tale concerning even Iuppiter

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Delphic stone, see the references in de Visser, *Die nicht menschengestaltigen Götter der Griechen*, 79-80.

<sup>60</sup> As appears from Theog., 498-500. But it is not known whether the stone was connected with Zeus before the legend grew up; it may have been venerated without anyone exactly knowing why.

<sup>61</sup> See W. Schmidt, *Origin and Growth of Religion*, 43 ff.

<sup>62</sup> Those which seem really to be Italian are given in Rose, *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 318, 320 ff.

or Mars which does not bear the stamp of foreign influence. Now it is impossible to tell a story unless one describes some person acting, or at least thinking. Thackeray wrote a novel without a hero, it is true, but neither he nor anyone else has yet achieved a novel without any characters at all, heroic or otherwise. In the case of a myth, which I take to be naïvely imaginative reflexion upon phenomena of nature or facts of cult, or both, there must still be a person around whom the products of such imagination may crystallize. Given, for instance, such a figure as Hyakinthos and the little group of cult-acts attaching to him, the myth-maker had something to work upon. Here was a person, however obscure, associated with Apollo, again a person and by no means an obscure one. It was easy to get away from the bare essentials of Hyakinthos' nature, his association with the fertility of the land, for instance, and imagine what manner of relationship that might have been which secured for him his lasting share in the great god's festivals. The tale of the unlucky throw with the discus was but one of many which might have grown up. Trophonios and Agamedes, again, were not great or widely known deities, but they were still persons, capable of doing something besides being vaguely worshipful beings; and it so happened that what they were credited with doing was an exploit of a master-thief, for Greek gods seldom minded a few jokes at their expense. But turn now to Diana of Aricia, as we commonly, though inaccurately, call her. She was a potent goddess enough, fervently worshipped and having very strange features in her ritual, the tabu on horses and the mysterious King of the Grove. For all that, she has not a scrap of legend to call her own, but is decked out in a few shabby borrowed plumes begged from Hippolytos and Orestes. But this is intelligible once we realize that in all probability she was, to start with, no more than a *numen*. That grove was a place where *mana* abounded, a spot full of *numina* which could easily become *sacrata* once a few names were furnished to put into the dative case. In time, the names were found, — Diana, Virbius, Egeria, — all of doubtful meaning, and so the *numen* could be invoked with better prospects of success; one did not have to say *si deus si dea*. But this is all; the name has no clear conception



of personality attached; it is merely the proper vocative of *numen* when prayer is offered on this spot, or its genitive or dative when a votive offering is to be labelled; it would be much too indefinite to say *numen*, *te precor quaesoque*, or to mark a dedicated object *numinis poculum* or *numini C. Titius u. s. l. m.*; such things would be like important letters with no address, and might be delivered to an entirely wrong kind of *numen*. What play has the imagination here? One makes up stories about people, not about names on a door-plate. Greeks perhaps would have overcome the difficulty, but Roman fancy was slower; having given to airy nothing a local habitation and a name, it had exhausted its capabilities.

I think therefore that we are justified in summing up our results thus. Animism does indeed play a very important part in Greek religious development at the earlier stages, and survives into later ones; of a pre-animistic state we have but few and doubtful traces. But in Italy, though animism, or something like it, was present in historical times (as indeed it could hardly help being, considering that the culture of that country was early and deeply affected from without), yet the pre-animistic state of mind reflected in the word *numen*, the only adequate classical translation of *mana* or *orenda*, remained strongly active till a comparatively late date, much later than in Greece, and thus did much to rob the native worship of picturesqueness and imaginative beauty. Whether this was altogether a regrettable thing is another matter; certainly Vergil seems to have found in the vague *numina* of his people scope for the meditations of a mind deeply pious,<sup>63</sup> and that in an age which regarded the creations of Greek mythopoeic fancy much as we do, while perhaps some part of the terror which clothes the Apollo of Veii springs from the mystery surrounding an Italian god whose personality was but just struggling forth from the clouds of *numen*, so that in truth ἦτε νυκτὶ ἐοικώς.

<sup>63</sup> This point is well made by C. Bailey, *Religion in Virgil*, especially chap. iii.

## NOTES

### THE UNIVERSAL FAMINE UNDER CLAUDIUS

THE historian Luke states that during the reign of Claudius a famine distressed the whole inhabited world.<sup>1</sup> Although several local famines in this period are well attested,<sup>2</sup> a general famine has not heretofore been confirmed by non-Biblical evidence. However, the recent publication of valuable information regarding the economic conditions in Egypt during the reign of Claudius presents new evidence in support of the account of Luke. We shall, therefore, study in turn (1) the Egyptian famine, (2) the Judaean famine, (3) the universal famine, and (4) the accessibility to Luke of definite evidence for the general famine.

### THE EGYPTIAN FAMINE

The abundance of the harvest in Egypt was directly dependent upon the height of the rise of the river Nile. When the Nile did not flood to a satisfactory level, the insufficient amount of moisture necessitated an early planting and resulted in a poor crop. On the other hand, an excessively high Nile flooded the fields far beyond the customary season for planting, and thus caused a late harvest far below the normal size.<sup>3</sup> For a low Nile under Claudius there is no evidence. There is, however, definite information that there was an unusually

<sup>1</sup> Acts xi, 27-30.

<sup>2</sup> There were famines at Rome in 41 (Seneca, *de brev. vit.* 18. 5; Aurelius Victor, *de Caes.* 4. 3), in 42 (Dio, LX, 11), and in 51 (Tacitus, *Ann.* XII, 43; Suet., *Claudius* 18. 2; Orosius, *Hist.* VII, 6. 17; A. Schoene, *Eusebii chronicorum libri duo*, Berlin, 1875, II, pp. 152 f.). There is no evidence for famine at Rome in 43 (cf. Dio, LX, 17. 8), nor in 47 (cf. Tac., *Ann.* XI, 4), nor in 48 (cf. Dio, LX, 31. 4; Tac., *Ann.* XI, 26). There was a famine in Greece about 49 (A. Schoene, *loc. cit.*), a shortage of military supplies in Armenia in 51 (Tac., *Ann.* XII, 50), and speculation in grain at Cibra (cf. M. Rostovtzeff, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft im Römischen Kaiserreich*, Berlin, 1929, note 20 to chapter VIII). However, the universal famine cannot satisfactorily be explained by assuming that it consisted in a sequence of local famines, for such a sequence has no objective unity.

<sup>3</sup> Pliny, *Nat. hist.* V, 58, XVIII, 167 ff.; Strabo, XVII, I. 3, 4; Amm. Marc., XXII, 15. 12 f. The accuracy of these accounts has been demonstrated by L. Borchardt, *Nilmesser und Nilstandsmarken* (Anhang zu den Abhandlungen der K. Preuss. Akad. der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Berlin, 1906, Abt. I, pp. 1-55).

high Nile during the reign of Claudius, in fact, the highest Nile of which Pliny found record. On this occasion the river rose to a height of eighteen cubits.<sup>4</sup> This was two cubits above the ideal height of sixteen, beyond which, as Ammianus Marcellinus records, no cultivator wished the river to rise. Since a famine occurred whenever the Nile rose to more than sixteen cubits,<sup>5</sup> there can be no doubt that this, the highest Nile in more than a century, certainly produced extensive distress in Egypt. A famine in Egypt during at least one year of the reign of Claudius is, therefore, definitely established.

The Egyptian famine may be dated in the year 45 on the evidence of the recently published documents from the register of the Grapheion at Tebtunis.<sup>6</sup> In August, September and November of this year the price of grain, as recorded in the papyri from Tebtunis, averaged about eight drachmas an artaba.<sup>7</sup> Thus the cost of wheat at this time was more than twice as high as any other recorded price in the Roman period before the reign of Vespasian.<sup>8</sup> It is impossible to determine, however, whether the fall of 45 marked the beginning or the end of the famine. Since Egypt at this time was dependent upon the harvest of the previous spring, a natural assumption is that the harvest of 45

<sup>4</sup> Pliny, *Nat. hist.* V, 58.

<sup>5</sup> Pliny, *Nat. hist.* XVIII, 168.

<sup>6</sup> A. E. R. Boak, *Papyri from Tebtunis, Part I* (Michigan papyri, Vol. II), Ann Arbor, 1933; cf. the review by Allan Chester Johnson, *The American Historical Review*, XL, 1935, pp. 480-483.

<sup>7</sup> A. E. R. Boak, *op. cit.* no. 123, verso, XI, 26-27; no. 127, I, 8, 12-14, 16, 17, 38. In A.D. 3 the price had been three drachmas an artaba (F. Preisigke, *Sammelbuch Griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten*, Strassburg, 1915-, no. 7341, 22-23); in 33 the price had been three drachmas an artaba (U. Wilcken, *Griechische Ostraka aus Ägypten und Nubien*, Leipzig, 1899, II, no. 1372); in 65 the price was only two drachmas and one obol an artaba (J. Tait, *Greek Ostraka*, London, 1930, I, p. 108, no. 210).

<sup>8</sup> Subsidiary arguments for the occurrence of famine may be drawn from the economic conditions of this year. Unusual distress is indicated by the fact that about one-sixth of the documents in P. Mich. 123 reveal indebtedness on the part of the inhabitants of Tebtunis. The rather large number of contracts for the nursing of slave children seems to imply that an unusually large number of children were exposed by parents unable to provide sustenance for their offspring. The leases of land reveal an unusual situation. More than a third of the leases (63 in a total of 136) specify pasturage or the raising of fodder. Inasmuch as cereals were the predominant crop in Egypt, this proportion may indicate that the cultivation of wheat in 45-46 was considered unprofitable because of a very high Nile; cf. A. C. Johnson, *loc. cit.* Stefan Waszyński (*Die Bodenpacht*, I, Leipzig, 1905) lists in all 133 leases of land, of which only seven deal with pasture land. This ratio has not greatly been affected by documents published since that date, apart from the Michigan papyri under consideration. See also F. Preisigke, S. B. no. 7461, and the low rent of one and one-third artaba per aroura in P. Lond. 604B (Vol. III, pp. 76 ff., about A.D. 47).



was very poor. Yet in the autumn of 45 the approximate size of the crop of 46 could be estimated from the reports of the rise of the Nile. If the forecast of the harvest of 46 was unusually poor, an immediate rise in price may have been caused by the hoarding of grain and by speculation in anticipation of a famine in the year 46-47. Thus the famine may have extended either from the fall of 44 to the spring of 46 or from the fall of 45 to the spring of 47. In any case, the price of grain in the fall of 45 affords definite evidence of famine at least from the fall of 45 to the next harvest in the spring of 46.

#### THE JUDAEAN FAMINE

When Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, Agabus came from Jerusalem and prophesied that there would be a famine over the whole inhabited world.<sup>9</sup> The Christians at Antioch, realizing that, because of the expense of transporting grain by land, the distress in Jerusalem would be far greater than in the commercial center of Antioch, took up a collection and sent the money to the elders in Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and of Paul. This famine, according to Luke, came to pass during the reign of Claudius.

To this same famine, beyond all question, must be referred the incidents recorded by Josephus of the great Judaeen famine, which occurred during the rule of the procurator Tiberius Alexander, that is, either in 46 or 47.<sup>10</sup> When the famine reached its height, Helena, the queen of Adiabene, visited Jerusalem and saw that many people were dying because they had no money to buy food. Moved to compassion, she sent her agents to Cyprus to purchase dried figs, and to Egypt to purchase grain. The cost of these provisions involved considerable expense. Yet the food was transported to Jerusalem very quickly,

<sup>9</sup> Acts xi, 27-30. On the meaning of *δλη ἡ οἰκουμένη* see Th. Zahn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*<sup>3</sup>, (Leipzig, 1907), II, p. 422. Karl Schmidt (*Die Apostelgeschichte*, Erlangen, 1882, I, pp. 157-164) would restrict the meaning of the phrase to the eastern and central possessions of Rome. C. C. Torrey (*The Composition and Date of Acts*, Harvard Theological Studies, Cambridge, I, 1916, pp. 20 f.) limits the significance of the phrase to Judaea upon the assumption of an Aramaic source for this portion of Acts.

<sup>10</sup> Josephus, *Antiq.* XX, 51-53, 101, III, 320 f.; Eusebius, *Hist. eccles.* II, 3, 8, 12; A. Schoene, *loc. cit.*; Orosius, *Hist.* VII, 6, 12; Zonaras, VI, 13 (= Paris I, 283D); Bede, *Hist. eccles.* I, 3. For the date of this famine, see Th. Zahn, *op. cit.* II, pp. 641 ff.; F. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake, ed., *The Beginnings of Christianity*, London, 1920-, Part I, V, pp. 452-455. The season of the year may be fixed with some probability in spring, for Josephus (*Antiq.* III, 320) refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The beneficence of Helena was certainly not extended in mid-winter, for the supplies which she purchased arrived very quickly (Josephus, *Antiq.* XX, 52).

and afforded great relief to the poor of the city. Further assistance was later obtained from Izates, the son of Helena and the ruler of Adiabene, who sent large sums of money to the principal men of Jerusalem for the support of the needy. When the famine was most severe, at the feast of the Passover shortly before the harvest, the price of grain rose so high that an *assaron* of wheat sold for four drachmas. At this time seventy *cors* of flour were brought into the court of the temple. The priests, however, remained loyal to the ceremonial laws for the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and refused to eat of the new supplies.<sup>11</sup> This famine was not restricted to Judaea proper, for, as Orosius testifies, all Syria suffered from the shortage of grain.<sup>12</sup>

### THE GENERAL FAMINE

In the ancient world, as in the modern, famine was always essentially a class famine.<sup>13</sup> Since the poor and the improvident never had large reserves either of money or of food, they suffered immediately upon any considerable rise in the cost of living. The rich, on the other hand, had large reserves both of money and of hoarded grain, and rarely, if ever, experienced hunger during famine. Thus, while all classes of society suffered serious economic discomfort during a shortage of grain, the actual hunger and starvation were restricted to the lower classes. As a famine became more severe, the distress mounted higher and higher in the social structure. Here lies the most crucial problem in the study of ancient famines, for the classical historians were little concerned with specific economic evidence, and never definitely recorded the extent to which famine pervaded the social structure of the ancient world.

Famine, then, did not consist in an absolute lack of food in the areas afflicted with scarcity. It centered rather in the current price of grain, and was caused by all the factors which raised the price of food. Among these causes primary importance must be given to

<sup>11</sup> The incident at the passover, recorded by Josephus in *Antiq.* III, 320 f., must refer to this famine, although there is some difficulty with regard to the high priest mentioned by Josephus (cf. F. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake, *loc. cit.*). H. Thackeray, in a note on this passage in the Loeb edition of the *Antiquitates*, places the incident during the rule of Nero on the ground that it is said to have occurred shortly before the great war. Yet from the point of view of the institution of the Mosaic ordinances about which Josephus is here writing, the reign of Claudius fulfills this requirement.

<sup>12</sup> Orosius, *Hist.* VII, 6. 12.

<sup>13</sup> The views here summarized are based upon a study of all famines in the Roman world to the time of Trajan, and will be presented fully in my doctoral dissertation.

local failures of the harvest, to the cost of importing grain from other regions, and especially to the speculation in grain and the hoarding which attended the delays in importing additional supplies of food. A universal famine, therefore, need not be explained by a general failure of the harvest. It is rather to be found in a general increase in the price of food, and in the universal inability of the poor to purchase food at the current price.

Now a failure of the harvest in one or two lands might easily affect the price of grain in the whole Mediterranean world. The failure of the afflicted countries to export grain, and perhaps even the necessity of transporting grain to supply their needs, would certainly have some effect upon all the markets of the Roman world. This was particularly true if Egypt suffered from scarcity, for this country ordinarily exported enormous quantities of grain.

The general famine under Claudius, therefore, consisted in the general dearth of wheat, caused most probably by the conjunction of the Egyptian and the Syrian failures of the harvest. The Egyptian famine is clearly dated in 45, extending at least into the spring of 46, and possibly into the year 47. Before the markets of the world could recover from the effect of this shortage, the failure of the harvest throughout Judaea and Syria either further raised prices or delayed the return to a more normal cost of living. Inasmuch as Helena was able to obtain grain from Egypt, it seems probable that, as the chronology indicates, the Egyptian famine slightly preceded the Judaeian misfortune, so that, although the two countries for a time suffered contemporaneously, the Judaeian famine grew more severe as the Egyptian situation improved. Thus when the Judaeian famine reached its height, the improvement in Egypt made it possible to dispatch supplies for the relief of Jerusalem. In view of the evidence for famine in Egypt in the spring of 46, it seems evident that the Judaeian famine was not relieved by Helena before the spring of 47. However, it should be noted that the supplies purchased by Helena do not afford conclusive proof that the countries from which these supplies were obtained had superfluous stores of food. The merchants naturally desired to sell their goods in the areas of greatest distress, for there they could obtain the highest price. While the Roman government at times restricted the exportation of grain, particularly from Egypt, official permission for exportation might have been granted, not indeed for humanitarian reasons, but in order to minimize the political discontent which was aroused by every severe famine.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> This was probably the reason that permission was given in 24-23 B.C. to export



The conjunction of the Egyptian and the Judæan famine certainly raised the cost of living in the West. The situation in western lands may have been intensified by internal dissensions during 45 in the most important western area for the production of grain, Africa. While little is known of the campaign of Galba in this year, it is striking that an African procurator found it necessary to undertake a military campaign.<sup>15</sup> Although the campaign was directed apparently against the Maurusii, a tribe living on the south-western border of the Roman possessions, the disturbance caused by the tribe evidently extended into Mauretania. It would appear, therefore, that the African supplies of grain may have been diminished in the very year of the Egyptian famine.

There is, therefore, no reasonable doubt that in all countries of the Mediterranean world the poor had to pay a higher price for food, and to suffer the distress of hunger when their money was exhausted. This was famine in the real sense of the word, as the word famine was conceived by the ancient writers. The universal famine of Luke is, therefore, definitely established by historical evidence. Since at this time the Christians were largely from the more impoverished classes of society, they were among the very first to experience the general distress.

#### LUKE'S EVIDENCE FOR THE GENERAL FAMINE

The statement that a general famine occurred is occasionally encountered in the ancient sources.<sup>16</sup> In some instances there is clearly no basis for the statement. The populace of one district, when they were afflicted with famine, sometimes imagined that other countries experienced the same distress, although they had definite knowledge only of local conditions. In some cases this inference may have been made because of the difficulty of importing supplies for the relief of the local famine. Certainly if the municipal officials were charged with negligence in the supervision of the food supply of the city, they would naturally repel the charge by asserting that a shortage of grain

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from Egypt to Judæa for the relief of famine more than three and a half million modii of wheat (Josephus, *Antiq.* XV, 299-316), although there was a famine at Rome in 23 (Velleius Paterculus, II, 94. 3; Suet. *Tiberius*, 8).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Münzer in *Pauly-Wissowa*, *Real-encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 2te Reihe, VII, 777 f.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, no. 3973; J. Palanque, *Famines à Rome à la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in *Revue des études anciennes*, XXXIII, 1931, pp. 346-356; also Dio, LIV, 1. 2.

in other localities hindered the early importation of grain. Consequently, the popular inference of extensive famine may have been made rather frequently during local famines.

Yet definite evidence of widespread famine, whenever such actually occurred, was available. The Roman officials in all the provinces were able to estimate every year the approximate totals of the approaching harvest, and they certainly did this in order to determine the approximate income of the annual revenue of the province.<sup>17</sup> These estimates of the approaching harvest were dispatched to Rome, not only to the emperor, but also to the *Praefectus annonae*, whose duty it was to ensure the transportation to Rome of sufficient grain for the sustenance of the capital city.<sup>18</sup> This official, therefore, possessed every year official reports of the state of the grain supply in all regions under the domination of the empire. Since Jews were at various times in the service of the imperial *annona*, as well as in the high favor of the emperor, it is entirely possible that accurate evidence of general conditions was transmitted to Palestine in the middle of the reign of Claudius.<sup>19</sup>

Another source of accurate information was the reports of the merchants of grain, who were well acquainted with the general conditions every year. While in private transactions they might misrepresent the extent of the scarcity for personal gain, deception was not easily practised when they dealt with the officials of the local governments. In Syria, as in other parts of the Roman world, the municipal officials were responsible for obtaining the supply of food for the city.<sup>20</sup> In making their arrangements for the importation of grain in accordance with their official duties, they naturally had direct relations with the merchants. Inasmuch as they had official means of communication, not only with other municipalities, but also with other provinces and with Rome through the provincial procurator, they could rarely be deceived by false reports. This was particularly true at Antioch, which was a commercial center of great importance.

<sup>17</sup> In Egypt these estimates were based upon the rise of the Nile (Strabo, XVII, 1. 48). In republican Sicily the Lex Hieronica provided for a yearly enrollment of farmers and for a yearly declaration of the acreage under cultivation (Cicero, in Verrem, actio II, III, 38, 120). In other provinces similar estimates presumably were made.

<sup>18</sup> On the *Praefectus annonae*, see O. Hirschfeld, *Die Kaiserlichen Verwaltungsbeamten*<sup>2</sup>, Berlin, 1905, pp. 240 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Schmidt (op. cit., I, p. 162) refers to the possibility of communication between the Jewish residents of Puteoli and Antioch.

<sup>20</sup> On the responsibility of local officials for the supply of grain, see M. Rostovtzeff, in Pauly-Wissowa, VII, 185 f.

At Antioch accurate information of general conditions was available, both from official and from semi-public sources. Since Luke, the author of the Acts, was probably a native of Antioch,<sup>21</sup> it is clear that he may have had access to reliable sources of information concerning the shortage of grain and the general famine.

We conclude, therefore, that the evidence of official documents among the papyri from Egypt and of the independent sources, Pliny and Josephus, so supports Luke's account of the universal famine that the accuracy of the statement can no longer be challenged.

KENNETH SPERBER GAPP

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. Harnack, *Luke the Physician*, New York, 1907, pp. 20 ff.





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